

QUESTION RE "ALMAH" AND "BETHULAH"  
Answered by Willis E. Bishop

"Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies and that seek Him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity; they also walk in His ways."

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this precious Book which thou has prepared for us in this period of time; a lamp unto our feet; a light unto our pathway, that guides not only our feet but our mind and our thoughts and our heart always. We pray as we come this morning that we may come with clean hands and pure heart; that the Spirit of God may open unto us the Word, and give unto each of us that thoughtfulness which helps us to weigh God's commandments before thee. And then, our Father, for the blessings in life we give thee thanks. We pray for those who are in serious need today. Be unto them a very present help -- in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

We have been trying to work our way bit by bit through the Gospel of John, and we have not laid aside that particular plan. However, from time to time there have been questions and we have tried to deal with those, and I hope you do not mind that, because I believe that if there is a question, perhaps that is more important to deal with than looking at another passage of Scripture.

Joel 1. We taught something concerning the Virgin Birth and the fact that there are several words in the Old Testament about which there has been some little discussion and argument. One of them is the Hebrew word "almah"; another one "bethulah". Without going into all that we did when we discussed these matters, the word "almah" in Isaiah 7:14, a prediction concerning the Virgin Birth, and I pointed out to you that this is the word which is used about six or seven times in the Old Testament and always of a pure, undefiled, unmarried, untouched girl.

Then there is the word "bethulah," which may be used of the same kind of woman, but which also may be used of a married woman. And we looked at some passages of Scripture which dealt with that. However, when we came to Joel 1:8, I read for you, "Lament like a "bethulah" girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth," and I pointed out that there the word "bethulah" is definitely used of a married woman. If I remember the question correctly, someone asked whether that word "husband" might not be understood in connection with a promise to marry rather than a married woman. I have double-checked my facts again and must say that the word "husband" as it is used there is definitely the one that is used regularly for the word "husband" -- the "bethulah" was a married woman.

There are other words, one for "bridegroom"; a word for "man", which is sometimes used for a husband, but this one, I think without question, is used in the sense that the husband was married to the "bethulah." In fact, Gesenius, in his lexicon (and Gesenius could

not be blamed for being conservative in his theology), very clearly makes the statement that this refers to a married woman. This is the conviction I have concerning the "bethulah" here and, therefore, when you read "bethulah" in the Scriptures (and you can't tell unless you have a commentary or some other reference), it may not mean a virgin as we think of "virgin". It may be, but it may not be.

Q. Isn't that word explained when it is used in the Scripture?

A. Yes, for example in Gen. 24, we find that Rebecca is called both an "almah" and a "bethulah". When the word "bethulah" is used of her, it also follows in that same verse, "neither knew she any man" to clarify the fact that she was at that point a virgin. So, the word "almah" always refers to a virgin; the word "bethulah" may or may not refer to a virgin, and the context must determine that.

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